Do you feel afraid and uncomfortable when you are around other people?
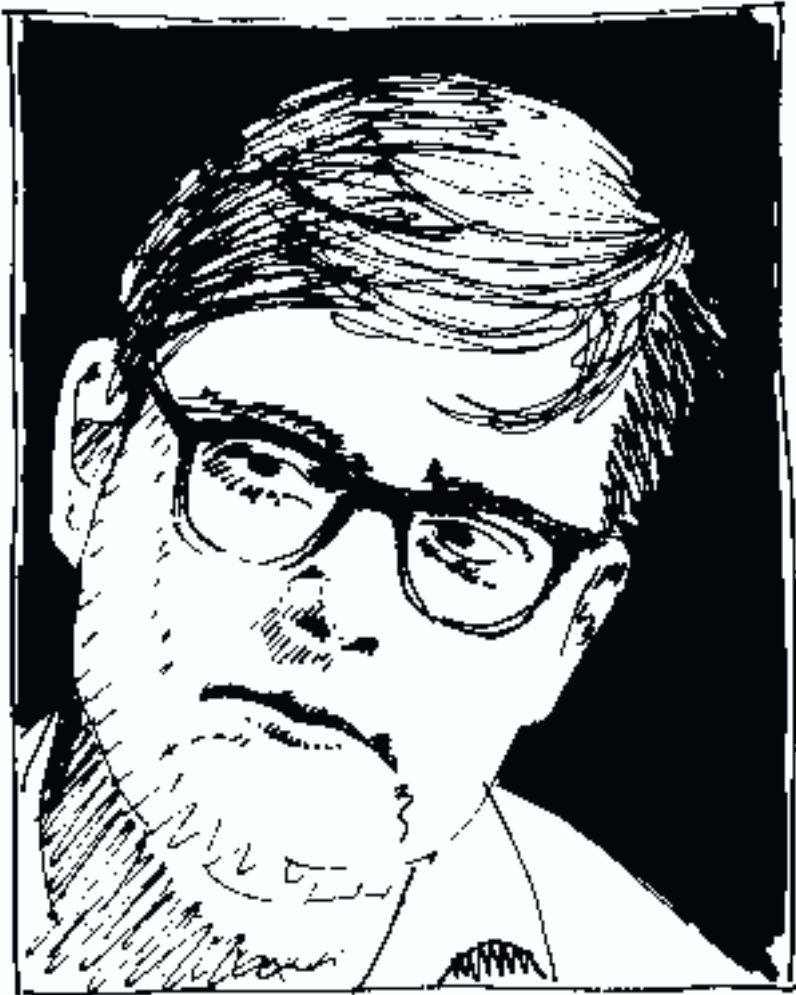
A REAL ILLNESS

Social Phobia

Do you feel afraid and uncomfortable when you are around other people? Is it hard for you to be at work or school? Please put a check in the box next to problems you have.

☐ I have an intense fear that I will do or say something and embarrass myself in front of other people.

☐ I am always very afraid of making a mistake and being watched and judged by other people.

☐ My fear of embarrassment makes me avoid doing things I want to do or speaking to people.

☐ I worry for days or weeks before I have to meet new people.

☐ I blush, sweat a lot, tremble, or feel like I have to throw up before and during an event where I am with new people.

☐ I usually stay away from social situations such as school events and making speeches.

☐ I often drink to try to make these fears go away.

If you put a check in the box next to some of these problems, you may have **Social Phobia.**

Social Phobia is a **real** illness that that can be serious.

Maybe you think your fear is just a part of who you are. And you may think you can't change the way you feel. But there is a name for your fear. It is social phobia.

It's not your fault if you have this illness, and you don't have to suffer.

Read this booklet and learn how to get help. You **can** feel better and get your life back!

1. What is Social Phobia?

Social phobia is a real illness. It can be treated with medicine and therapy.

If you have social phobia, you are very worried about embarrassing yourself in front of other people. Your fears may be so serious that you cannot do everyday things. You may have a very hard time talking to people at work or school. Your fear may even keep you from going to work or school on some days.

You may worry that you will blush and shake in front of other people. You may believe that people are watching you, just waiting for you to make a mistake. Even talking on the phone, signing a check at the store, or using a public restroom can make you afraid.

Many people are a little nervous before they meet new people or give a speech. But if you have social phobia, you worry for weeks before. You may do anything to stay away from the situation.

2. When does Social Phobia start and how long does it last?

Social phobia usually starts when a person is still a child or teenager. It is rare for it to start after a person reaches their mid-twenties. Anyone can have social phobia, but more women than men have the illness. It sometimes runs in families.

Without treatment, social phobia can last for many years or even a lifetime.

3. Am I the only person with this illness?

No. You are not alone. In any year, at least 5.3 million Americans have social phobia.

4. What can I do to help myself?

■ **Talk to your doctor about your fears and worries.** Tell your doctor if these worries are keeping you from doing everyday things and living your life. You may want to show your doctor this booklet. It can help you explain how you feel.

■ **Ask your doctor if he or she has helped other people with social phobia.** Special training helps doctors treat people with social phobia. If your doctor doesn't have special training, ask for the name of a doctor or counselor who does.

■ **Get more information.** Call 1-88-88-ANXIETY to have free information mailed to you.

You **can** feel better.

5. What can a doctor or counselor do to help me?

■ A doctor may give you medicine to help you feel less anxious and afraid. But it may take a few weeks for the medicine to work.

■ Talking with a specially trained doctor or counselor helps many people with social phobia. This is called "therapy." Therapy helps you become more comfortable in social situations.

Here is one person's story:

"In school I was always afraid of being called on, even when I knew the answers. When I got a job, I hated to meet with my boss. I couldn't even sit and have lunch with my co-workers. I worried about being stared at or judged, and that I would make a fool of myself. My heart would pound, and I would start to sweat when I thought about meetings. The feelings got worse the closer the event came. Sometimes I couldn't sleep or eat for days before a staff meeting.

"A friend told me to call the doctor. I'm so glad I did. My doctor gave me medicine that helps me feel less afraid around people. It is hard work, but a counselor is helping me learn to cope better with my fears in social settings."

Remember –
you can get help now:

■ Talk to your doctor about your fears and worries.

■ Call 1-88-88-ANXIETY (1-888-826-9438). It is a free call.
You will get free information about social phobia mailed to you.

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is part of the Federal government. NIMH conducts medical research to find new and better ways to prevent and treat mental illnesses. NIMH also provides free information about mental illnesses.

To get free information about other mental illnesses, write to NIMH at:

National Institute of Mental Health

6001 Executive Boulevard

Room 8184, MSC 9663

Bethesda, MD 20892-9663

You can also find free NIMH information online at:

http://www.nimh.nih.gov